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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002589

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA, EUR/SE, PM AND EAP. BAGHDAD ALSO FOR CJTF-7

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SUBJECT: IRAQ: TGS OPEN TO SUPPORTING OTHER COUNTRIES'  
ROTATION OF TROOPS

(U) Classified by Political-Military Affairs Counselor  
Timothy A. Betts. Reasons: 1.5 (B and D).

1. (C) Summary: Seoul is exploring the possibility of deploying its troops to Iraq through Turkey. The Turkish military is supportive, but has encouraged the Koreans to seek a political decision from the GOT before planning on transiting Turkey. If the ROK pursues this route, we expect the Turks to be helpful although, as we found early last year, obviously military equipment traveling overland to Iraq may not be possible. End summary.

2. (C) During a recent meeting on an unrelated issue, Turkish General Staff (TGS) Agreements Branch Chief Col. Karacoban told deputy pol-mil counselor that South Korea was interested in using Turkish bases to deploy its troops to Iraq, assuming the ROK made a political decision to contribute troops there. Karacoban said if South Korea decides to deploy troops to either Irbil or Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq, it "has little choice but to go through Turkey." He added the Koreans were "pressing" TGS for detailed information regarding the availability and capability of specific Turkish bases and ports. According to preliminary informal discussions, the South Korean military is interested in using military airlift to transport its troops from South Korea to northern Iraq via Turkey, and possibly sealift to transport initial heavy supplies/equipment to the Turkish port of Iskenderun. The South Koreans would then transport heavy supplies overland via Turkey to northern Iraq.

3. (C) Karacoban stressed that TGS had not taken a formal position on whether to assist South Korea. While he personally saw no reason not to allow the Koreans to use Turkish air bases to deploy troops to Iraq, Karacoban said the decision was not his nor TGS's. "It is up to the politicians." Karacoban said TGS intends to inform the South Korean military that it will not discuss further any request until it had "authorization" from Turkish "political authorities," and that all further inquiries should be directed to the Turkish MFA.

4. (C) On a related matter, Karacoban said TGS was facilitating the rotation of Hungarian troops to Iraq. TGS and Hungarian military officials were discussing whether to use Incirlik Air Base or a military base in Ankara to allow Hungarian troops to RON en route to Iraq. Karacoban understood that Hungary intended to deploy around 350 troops to Iraq, 30 at a time. The Hungarians prefer Incirlik, but TGS intends to steer them toward Ankara due to the greater availability of quality sleeping accommodations.

5. (C) Deputy pol-mil counselor encouraged TGS to "get the word out" that Turkey was assisting coalition members other than the US to contribute to the GWOT and stabilization efforts in Iraq. Karacoban said TGS was reluctant to make such efforts public for fear that "others" would criticize the military for allowing countries to make use of Turkish soil for "Iraq operations." Deputy pol-mil counselor responded that TGS and other official Turks, at a minimum, should share with US and other Allies Turkey's positive contributions.

6. (C) Comment: It is not surprising that TGS (at least at the staff officer level) is willing to facilitate the rotation of others' troops to Iraq. TGS backed the GOT's December 2003 decision to allow the US military to rotate US personnel out of Iraq -- a decision the GOT views as consistent with UNSCR 1483 and the Council of Ministers June 2003 decision to support stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq. It is less surprising that TGS is not willing to enter into formal discussions with South Korea without authorization from Turkish political authorities.

Given TGS's experiences with the discussions with US military authorities prior to commencement of operations in Iraq (where it was criticized for getting out in front of the politicians), TGS is unlikely to authorize other countries' use of Turkish bases, ports or territory without appropriate political backing. If South Korean submit a formal request to use Turkish air bases to rotate their troops to Iraq, we suspect the GOT (including TGS) will respond positively. Requests to use Turkish territory to transport troops or equipment overland to Iraq are another matter. Given the overwhelming negative political reaction in February 2003 to the possibility that US forces would pass overland through Turkey to Iraq, we doubt whether the GOT would allow South Koreans to move obviously military equipment overland to Iraq. Sustainment supplies might be permitted to go overland, but would add to the congestion at Turkey's lone border crossing to Iraq.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
EDELMAN